

From Midnight to Silence

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Before reading this peak at chapter 2, check out chapter 1,
originally published as the short story

[MORBID SILENCE](#)

CHAPTER 2, Relentless Spirits

The ting, ting, ting of Victoria's steel high heels echoed through the dusty silence as she climbed the stairs of the derelict star-cruiser sitting on a planet near the edge of Sector Silence. Moon beams cut diagonally through the porous wreck, washing the walls with blue. Victoria stopped at deck eight and sniffed. She wasn't there yet. She continued up.

It had been six years since Victoria last found Luke, six years since she last tracked him down in this same ribbon of space. "Has Luke been hiding here this whole time?" Victoria wondered aloud. No matter. This would be the last time she would have to hunt Luke down. This time Victoria had a special, little gift just for him.

In a pocket hidden in the hem of Victoria's tiny, red dress was a micro-bomb capable of disintegrating someone's head. Normally, Victoria didn't bother with such toys but this was different. After years of frustrating pursuit, Victoria wanted Luke's death to be as violent and as certain as possible. Of course, before she used the micro-bomb, Victoria intended to make Luke suffer.

As Victoria crested the stairs onto deck ten, the stench of ghoul wafted over her. Luke was very close. Victoria marched down the corridor, her stiletto heels pounding the floor, inviting Luke to attack. Suddenly, the steel beneath her feet vanished and Victoria found herself falling face first into a pit of metal spikes. With a feline's ease, Victoria flipped around and caught herself in a handstand gripping two of the metal shards. A bead of black blood dripped from her left palm and slithered down the makeshift spike before bursting into ash.

From the edge of the pit, Luke gazed down. A jagged fissure split the upper-left quarter of his head away from the rest. While most of him was a waxy yellow with coarse, black hair, that one quarter of his head was smooth and white with silky dark locks. That one quarter belonged to Victoria.

Looking at the goey fissure, Victoria could see right down to the skull. It was disgusting but that wasn't good enough. Victoria had expected more from her blood. She wanted to see him bloated and splitting in half like the only other ghoul she'd ever seen. That other ghoul was why feeding on your fellow vampire was taboo; that other ghoul was the more likely outcome. This, Victoria didn't know what this was. Luke was neither god nor ghoul. He even seemed to be getting better since the last time that Victoria saw him. Well, whatever he was, she was going to kill it.

"A tiger pit, Luke? Really?" Victoria taunted.

Luke held up a Tommy K-Gun, a human thing that spewed Kemma rounds from a drum clip. Luke charged the coil. An electric whine stung the air. Victoria had about half a second to get out of the way. She launched herself backwards through the air, snatching Luke's weapon from his hands before landing beside him.

Holding the gun as if it were a soiled rag, Victoria shook her head. "You need these human toys? No wonder you're afraid of the wild humans." Victoria chuckled. "Don't you realize that you're afraid of your own food?"

Victoria flung the gun against the wall. The drum cracked, rupturing several rounds. Their watery contents merged into a glob of shimmering chartreuse that ate through the deck and then through the next deck and the next and the next and on through the ship, finally sinking into the soil below.

From under Luke's long coat, a blade sailed at Victoria's neck. She jumped back but not fast enough. Blood trickled down her front.

"Don't feel like talking?" croaked Victoria as she held her half-severed esophagus together, allowing it time to knit itself back together.

"I've been talking, dear Princess," Luke replied as he maneuvered around her, his sword poised defensively, "just not to you."

What the hell did that mean? A cascade of possibilities flashed through Victoria's mind. Could he mean he was talking to that other ghoul? Another rogue vampire, perhaps? Maybe some wild human? Or someone back on Midnight? None of it seemed plausible, not for this fool.

Seeing his chance, Luke swung. A thin trail of ash arced behind his sword, ash that used to be Victoria's blood. Victoria followed the blade's descent and caught it between her palms. As the blade shuddered, Luke stared at it, stunned.

"Gee, someone's been practicing," Victoria trilled. "I think it was me."

"I will take your head off!" roared Luke.

"No, you had your chance," laughed Victoria. "Now it's my turn."

With a swift swing of her leg, her steel heel cleared his blade and sliced his throat to match her own.

"Look," she giggled, her voice still coarse, "now we're twins!"

Holding his throat together, Luke yanked the blade from Victoria's grasp, throwing himself off balance and lurching back a step. The sharpened tip of Victoria's steel stiletto flew at his face. He dropped to one knee and thrust his sword up, driving it into Victoria's chest. Victoria roared. With great pain, she turned, ripping the sword from Luke's hands.

Gasping, Victoria fell sideways into the wall, Luke's blade protruding from her back. Wrapped in pain, Victoria could feel her inner monster seeping around the edges of her eyes. But there was no need for that. Victoria stuffed her monster back in its coffin and wrenched the sword from her body.

Unarmed, Luke backed down the hall. "I'm not afraid of my food, *Princess*," he snarled. "I'm afraid of your reckless stupidity... as are others."

"Well," said Victoria as she dropped the bloody blade to the floor, "I'm not afraid of anything, especially not a thing like you."

Victoria launched her sharpened heel at his eye once more. Luke just smiled and punched a makeshift button mounted on the wall beside him. A bulkhead dropped between them. The already flying Victoria crashed into the sudden wall and crumbled to the floor.

Three more thunks sounded in the corridor beyond the door. Luke was getting away. Victoria couldn't let him. Victoria jumped back to her feet and threw herself against the bulkhead. She worked it from every angle until she figured out how to rip it down. The second one came down faster.

While Victoria and Luke played cat and mouse, William sat high above in a low orbit. He leaned on the hail button even harder as if that would make Victoria answer. His sensors showed no life, no explosions, nothing. Was she in trouble? Was she out of range? More likely, she was ignoring him, probably turned her helmet comm off, if she was even still wearing her spacesuit. He really hated that. He hated it almost as much as he hated this place that the wild humans called Sector Silence.

Long ago, the humans tried to colonize these planets but it always ended in Morbid Silence. No part of this narrow band of space would accept a colony and so the wild humans almost never came here anymore. But William couldn't care less about feral food. After all he'd been through during his years on Earth before The Ascent, back when the wild humans were truly wild, sending hounds down into their crypts to drive them out into the Sun... compared to them, William found these modern humans soft and docile.

But this place, this cursed ribbon of darkness, it raged across William's nightmares. This place and the vampires that they lost here, William never stopped dreaming about them. After all these centuries, the dream remained unchanged... William locked in his coffin, his brethren only inches away but unable to help them. Every time they came here, the nightmares intensified. Why did Victoria keep bringing him here? When could they leave already? William leaned harder on the hail button. It broke.

Suddenly, a massive blob appeared on his infrared scope. Something had just exploded right next to Victoria's skimmer. William's heart sank. She wasn't wearing her suit, he knew it. She'd be hurt. William dropped into a steep reentry dive. As flames wrapped the shuttle, ice shook his spine. What had she done to herself now? He tried not to think about it and just get down there fast.

When the reentry flames parted, William wanted to vomit. A massive shaft of frost-blue fire towered into the sky. William leaned on the broken hail button. It did nothing. As he raced toward the ground, William charged the forward weapons and woke the emergency rations. Anything could be happening down there.

After breaking through a halo of smoke, William pulled the shuttle into a sharp swoop and hovered. Helmets, suits, and swords slammed around the back. Before him, the massive, blue column of fire climber into the sky as it devoured a forgotten star-cruiser.

Victoria was dead, she had to be dead.

William swept the landing sight and found Victoria's tiny skimmer. There, under the clear canopy, draped over the pilot's seat, was Victoria's empty suit. If she was in that fire, there was probably nothing left of her, not even ash. Gazing mournfully into the black whirlwinds streaming from the base of the burning metal, William knew he was too late. He'd failed again.

But then he saw something move. William pulled the shuttle closer, thinning the haze with his thrusters. Something was definitely in there. He stared harder and harder until, out of the lashing arms of caustic smoke, staggered a monster with a body half burned into coal.

William couldn't believe it; it was Victoria's monster, alive. Most of her skin was gone; what she had left was as thick and grey as a rhino's. A cage of daggers filled her gasping mouth. Nothing remained of her hair or her dress. Her shoes, on the other hand, were just fine.

Reaching the edge of the billowing black, Victoria collapsed. She could breathe again but it hurt, everything hurt. The warm breath of thrusters swept over her. Someone was coming. Prying her chard eyelids open, she saw three figures silhouetted against the three moons glowing through the thinning clouds above. Someone gathered her in a blanket and helped her to her feet.

“Bomb,” muttered Victoria, “last door.”

“Shush,” said William’s voice, “I have you.”

A fragrant skin brushed Victoria’s lips. She could feel every fang in her mouth throbbing. While Victoria drifted in the background, Victoria’s monster opened her mouth and plunged its daggers into bare flesh. Blood filled Victoria’s mouth. Muscles reformed across her face and down her body. She began returning to her preferred form. The monster’s long teeth retracted but Victoria continued to feed. An auburn main unfurled down her back. Skin regrew and softened.

Patches of melted dress fell away like dead leaves; from behind one dropped a tiny, steel ball. Victoria drank the last and released the young girl’s body to the ground. Gesturing toward the steel micro-bomb, Victoria whispered, “Be a dear and fetch that.”

William obeyed.

Victoria was Victoria again but she needed more. She cast a hungry eye toward the other girl. The slave was dressed in the traditional, dingy grey of the feeding stock but it did not diminish her beauty. Victoria beckoned her forward. With her eyes respectfully turned to the ground, the girl obeyed.

Victoria embraced the slave. Brushing the girl’s soft, golden curls aside, Victoria inhaled the delicate fragrance of her food. William had chosen well this trip. Victoria drank. The girl’s blood surged into her veins, enriching her flesh. Her red hair turned from auburn to copper to crimson and brick before finally settling on a brilliantly bright cherry red that hung the length of her back.

Victoria tossed the empty body aside. As she stood there nude in the cool breeze under the fluttering light, William offered her a grey tunic recovered from the expended rations. Victoria waved it away. She had another dress in the shuttle. “Load the skimmer,” she ordered.

William bowed. “Yes, Princess.”

“No bowing... Luke’s not dead. Go!”

William ran to get the small glider while Victoria stomped into the ship and got into another short, red dress, a dark blood this time. Her hair changed its shade to match. Checking her shoes she found that she’d have to have them re-leathered, again, but they were still functional. Victoria went to the cockpit took the pilot’s seat. William returned from stowing the skimmer under the shuttle. As Victoria powered up the thrusters, she asked William, “Which way did Luke go?”

“I have no idea,” replied William.

Victoria turned sharply. “What?”

“I didn’t see where he went. When that whole vessel lit up...”

Victoria jumped up and backhanded him into a wall. “That was your job!” Her fist slammed his jaw, snapping it in two places. “That was your only job!”

Pressing his jaw back together, William mumbled, “I wenf fo helf fou.”

Victoria grabbed him by his suit and drove him into the back wall of the small shuttle. “You weren’t supposed to help me!” Stomping back to the pilot’s seat, she grumbled, “You were supposed to track him. I help me. You track him.” She fired up all the sensors. “Damn idiot.” There was absolutely nothing on her screens.

She flew the ship up into orbit and swung her array in all directions. Nothing, nothing, and more nothing.

Damn moron idiot!

Victoria kept spinning, searching in every direction until it became too obviously futile. She stopped. It was over. Victoria was not done with William but that would wait for later. It was time to head home and start over once again.

Before turning for home, Victoria swung her primary array in toward the heart of Sector Silence, in toward a certain star with a certain planet that lay beneath a shroud of never parting mist.

That wild little girl had to be about sixteen now, not quite old enough to be turned. Not that it mattered. You did not turn wild humans. That was an honor reserved for domesticated humans and it had to be earned through combat... and only to replace a dead vampire. Victoria had broken rules and traditions before but this would really be stepping beyond reason. Besides, right now, she had enough trouble with the cowards back home, fearing their own instinct to hunt.

Reluctantly, Victoria turned her shuttle toward Space Station Midnight and vanished in a blur of light.